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NEWS

Macomb County adds wireless Internet in jury waiting room

■ Prospective jurors can now surf on their laptops while waiting to be selected.

By Chad Selweski

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Macomb County is now providing its prospective jurors Internet access while waiting in the courthouse.

The move couldn't come soon enough for Jessica Westness of Sterling Heights. She said she served on jury duty last fall and endured four days of boredom, staring off into space.

This time, her call to duty was spent in cyberspace.

Westness was among the first to take advantage of new wireless Internet access in the jury room of the Macomb County courthouse, where prospective jurors wait to be called to a case.

On Wednesday, the wi-fi service allowed Westness to use her laptop computer to keep tabs on the Troy pre-school where she serves as director.

"I'm getting a lot of e-mails from parents about enrolling their children in the fall," said Westness, 26. "This way, I can respond quickly and not let things build up. I like to be busy, doing something productive."

The wi-fi service initiated by county Clerk Carmella Sabaugh follows on the heels of a Sabaugh pilot program to limit jury service to one day or one trial. In the past, prospective jurors were forced to serve four days until, if they weren't picked for a trial, they were let go.

Sabaugh said she's attempting to make jury duty less boring, less burdensome, especially for those who cannot afford to spend days disconnected from the office.

"It (the new system) is working extremely well," she said. "People are able to get their work



Macomb Daily staff photo by Craig Gaffield

Don Hineman of Shelby Township and Jessica Westness of Sterling Heights man their laptops in the Macomb County Circuit Court jury room while waiting to be called on a case.

done. They spend a day and they're able to do something constructive while waiting to do their civic duty."

The high-tech approach allows prospective jurors to use their laptop computers, handheld wireless devices or Internet-enabled phones while passing time in the jury room. When the wi-fi program was launched last week, jurors were informed by mail of the new service and eight

immediately took advantage.

Westness said that when she last served on jury duty in November, she spent most of her four days in the jury room filling out Christmas cards, watching television, and getting bored. On Wednesday, she was pecking away at her laptop keyboard, sending e-mails and working on lesson plans through her pre-school's Web site.

Seated next to her was Don

Hineman, 53, a Shelby Township real estate agent who planned to get some work done on his computer, though he admitted spending part of the morning killing time on other matters. He had traded instant messages with his daughter in Pennsylvania and visited some of his favorite Web sites.

"I was checking on the sports scores and surfing the Internet," he said.